

## Improving Biosecurity on Turkey Farms

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The turkey industry has learned some painful yet valuable biosecurity lessons over the past few years. We've learned that a farm in a densely populated area is more likely to have disease problems than an isolated farm. We've learned that having two (or more) ages of turkeys on a farm at the same time, while maximizing facility utilization, makes disease more likely and makes it more difficult to break a disease cycle. We've learned that inadequate down time can make disease problems worse. We know now that premature movement of litter from a disease situation can amplify the problem. We also have become more aware of the potential for disease problems associated with dead bird disposal. Perhaps most importantly, we've learned that timely communications between and within companies can have a major impact on disease incidence and severity. These lessons have helped us improve biosecurity within an area and on the individual farm. Still, there is plenty of room for improvement – even on newer single-age farms.

Biosecurity remains essentially a numbers game. In other words, reduce the number of organisms a flock is exposed to and you reduce that flock's risk of infection. Increase the number of organisms; increase the risk. The most likely source of disease causing organisms for any flock is another flock (commercial or otherwise) that's already infected. There are numerous things that can potentially carry organisms from an infected flock to a naïve one. These include insects, wild birds, rodents and other animals, vehicles, equipment, and **people**. Our challenge is to minimize this potential.

Every company has a biosecurity program of one degree or another. These company programs usually intensify when a disease outbreak (AI, MG, or TCV) occurs in a given area. Some aspects of such a program will be illustrated. Many times these company programs fail to address the most basic element of biosecurity – grower and employee education. The learning curve can be very steep when birds are being destroyed and farms left depopulated. On the other hand, the process can be frustrating under normal, everyday conditions. Nevertheless, we can't expect people to buy into a program if they don't understand why we're asking them to implement it. Materials are available in both English and Spanish from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services and the Cooperative Extension Service. Another excellent resource is the new CD from the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association entitled "Poultry Disease Risk Management: Practical Biosecurity." To obtain the CD visit the USP&EA web site at <http://www.poultryegg.org>.

Here are some basic steps a grower can take to improve biosecurity at the farm level:

- 1) **Make it difficult for unnecessary visitors to enter your farm.** Install a gate. Post signs alerting visitors of disease risk. Keep doors locked.
- 2) **Make it easy for essential visitors to practice good biosecurity.** Provide a vehicle wash station. Make disposable boots and other items such as hairnets and coveralls available.
- 3) **Avoid contact with other poultry.** This seems obvious, but how many growers have someone working on their farm who may have contact with “backyard” birds?
- 4) **Maintain the pump house as a “clean” area.** The pump house is often a source of cross-contamination between houses, especially on two-age farms. Treat it like a separate house to minimize this problem.
- 5) **Provide a means of sanitizing boots between houses.** Dip pans can work, but are seldom maintained properly. A hose and siphon valve can be easier to maintain and more effective. Having separate boots for each house is also an option.
- 6) **Have clothing strictly dedicated to farm use.** It’s a little extra trouble, but going to lunch at the local grill and then re-entering poultry houses increases the chance of disease introduction.
- 7) **Maintain a vigilant pest control program.** This is a constant battle. Take whatever steps are necessary to keep fly and beetle numbers at a minimum. Keep rodent bait available and rotate when necessary. Keep wire and side walls in good repair. Install a hot wire around houses to deter varmints. When houses are empty, keep end doors or summer doors closed when not tilling or cleaning out.
- 8) **Inspect vehicles and equipment coming onto the farm.** Cleanout crews and others who go from farm to farm, including company vehicles and personnel, are a very real disease threat. Provide a means for cleanup or deny them entry to the farm.

The best way to encourage growers to practice good biosecurity is to set a good example. This involves a certain “mind set.” Maintaining a clean vehicle and going through the steps of putting on boots, coveralls, and hairnets for every farm visit lets growers know that you’re serious about it. Remember, it’s a numbers game. The more steps we take to reduce the spread of disease organisms, the more we reduce the risk of infection.